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**BIRTH CONTROL  
ABORTION AND STERILIZATION**



# BIRTH CONTROL ABORTION AND STERILIZATION

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## PREFACE

IT is with great pleasure that I write a short preface to the English edition of Dr J. H. Leunbach's little book on Birth Control.

Dr Leunbach, who lives and practices in Copenhagen, is known throughout Denmark as an advocate of, and an expert in, contraception. He is equally well known to all of us who have interested ourselves in the subject of Birth Control, and especially to those of us who have met him and listened to him in those international Congresses where the world's few authorities on contraception and contraceptives meet to exchange views and to learn from each other's experience what they should have been taught—but were not—in their universities and medical schools.

The two lectures which together make up this book were delivered respectively at the second and third International Congresses of the World League for Sexual Reform, held respectively in Copenhagen, July 1928, and in London, September 1929.

Dr Leunbach not only advocates Birth Control as a means to social and individual betterment

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he also spends a great deal of his time actually teaching contraceptive methods to physicians and to patients.

The English text was prepared by Dr Leunbach himself, and I have altered his English only where I thought his meaning was not quite clear, and in such cases after careful comparison with the German edition.

I recommend this book to all who are interested in the problem of Birth Control, whether they are advocates or antagonists.

NORMAN HAIRE, CH.M., M.B.

*Harley Street, London.*

*21 January, 1930.*

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## BIRTH CONTROL: ITS IMPORTANCE, PURPOSE AND TECHNIQUE<sup>1</sup>

BIRTH CONTROL is one of the most burning questions of our time, and it enters very largely into any discussion regarding social and economic problems. No matter what social questions are introduced—house shortage, unemployment, immigration and emigration—they all end in discussion on birth control. In this respect a great change has taken place since the War. Before that time—in the good old days—there did exist far-sighted spirits who pointed out the fundamental importance of the population question. But their voices were drowned by the prevailing tendency to dismiss this question as something irrelevant to social problems.

In nearly all quarters there was an almost touching unanimity of opinion that the population-question was something quite unimportant, and that it only brought an unpleasant disturbance into the discussion if touched upon.

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Second Congress of the World League for Sexual Reform.—Copenhagen, July, 1928.

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This was equally true of socialists and anti-socialists—especially the socialists, however. It had become one of the dogmas of socialism that Malthus' theories had been severely refuted by subsequent events ; and it was considered heresy and unpardonable deviation from socialistic ways of thinking to dare to maintain that perhaps Malthus might be right to a certain extent.

In this, as I said, a considerable change has taken place during recent years. It has been discovered that the enormous technical development of the past century and the opening up of one new territory after another overseas, had created an abnormal or at least transitory situation, which seemed for a short period to suspend the main laws to which Malthus had pointed. Malthus had uttered the simple truth that, like all other organic beings, man has a tendency to unlimited multiplication, whereas the surface of the earth and the food supply of mankind must necessarily be limited.

This point of view has led to important results in biology, and, among other things, forms the foundation of Darwin's theory of natural selection. But the same point of view must also be used as the basis of the science of political economy and for practical attempts to create a better life for mankind. When once this truth has been grasped,

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it seems so axiomatic, that we can hardly understand why everyone does not see it, and why such a fierce opposition is directed against this point of view. When one considers the matter more deeply, however, one can understand the vigorous opposition to Malthus' standpoint. This point of view and its consequences are of a most revolutionary effect, and run counter to a lot of age-old prejudices and lines of thought.

To-day I shall make an attempt to show the extent of the influence the Malthusian point of view and its practical consequence, birth control, will exercise in all fields of human life and thought.

By birth control I understand the limitation of the number of births resulting from the conscious endeavour of human beings to avoid procreation, no matter what means are employed for this purpose. First I shall mention the population question itself, and its influence upon social conditions ; and for the sake of lucidity, I shall consider three different possibilities.

*First possibility :* If no conscious birth control took place at all, if human beings, like the animals, followed the propagation impulse blindly and produced as many children as fate or providence sent. This is desired by hardly anyone in civilized countries. But the ideal of the church and national-

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ism tends in this direction. The great masses at any rate, resigned to the will of God, ought to present the greatest possible number of new citizens to the fatherland.

The *second possibility* is the right of all human beings to complete control of their own multiplication. That is an ideal towards which only very few revolutionary spirits are aiming. It will no doubt be a long time before this ideal can be entirely realized.

The technical methods are, frankly, as yet, far from perfect ; but it is, nevertheless, a fact that the complete control of procreation can be obtained already, and as far as many are concerned it is actually a reality. As yet, however, only for a small minority in the most advanced countries.

Technically it is possible that all human beings all over the earth could learn to control propagation, but the necessary psychological and legal conditions are not yet existent. Even the most perfect contraceptive *may* fail, and in such case there must be access to a safe and harmless termination of pregnancy, before it can be said that complete self-determination exists.

The *third possibility* is of the greatest practical interest since it actually exists to-day—a quite small minority has obtained the full right of self-

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determination ; a far greater minority know to a larger or smaller extent how to limit the number of children, whereas the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of the earth are practically unable at all to control propagation. I am well aware that most primitive peoples do practise birth control in various ways, a.o. by infanticide. But the form of conscious self-determination right for the individual, obtained by modern civilized people, is yet almost unknown among uncivilized peoples—and it is that form which we are discussing here.

Among uncivilized peoples the birth-rate is very high. It is not possible to obtain any reliable statistics as to how high it is. But one may estimate it at 40-50 per 1000 inhabitants, about the same figure as was recorded in Europe about 100 years ago, when reliable statistics were first obtained, and before conscious birth control on a larger scale had begun.

In the countries where we meet such a high birth-rate, hygienic development is far behind that of Western Europe, and mortality is also many times greater. *The excess of births over deaths* and not the birth-rate itself decides the rapidity of the growth of population. The increase does not therefore take place so rapidly in those

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countries as might be expected from the high birth-rate. Nevertheless, the increase of population in such countries as India and China takes place so rapidly that it is a great factor in creating the poverty and misery prevailing in those countries. It is said that during the last 25 years of the past century 26 million people have thus died from famine in India.

In the European countries where the mortality-rate, due to improved hygiene, has come down to 10-15 per thousand, a birth-rate of 40-50 would mean an enormously rapid growth of population. The consequence would undoubtedly be a further impairment of social conditions which are very bad already. Unemployment and house-shortage would drive a great many people into the most extreme wretchedness, provoke incessant revolutions and disturbances which would increase the difficulty of ameliorating the almost unbearable social conditions of the masses.

It is no use to object that there would be abundant room for twice as many people if the capitalistic order was abolished and the socialistic one introduced. We live in a capitalistic society, and as long as this is so, an increase of population at that rate would probably be fatal. Let us once attain a socialistic society—then it may be possible that

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there would be room for a doubled population—but so far there is not !

Besides such a rapid growth of population would inevitably lead to wars on account of the desire for expansion that the individual countries might have. How great a share overpopulation had in the causes of the World War it will hardly be possible ever to find out, but it was certainly not without influence.

Opponents of birth control as a rule do not think of these consequences, which, I am sure, nobody finds desirable.

I shall not waste more time on this first possibility which, fortunately, is only Utopian, inasmuch as birth control is already practised to a great extent and surely will not be given up by those who have once begun to use it.

I shall pass over to the second possibility which, I think, is not Utopian, but whose realization is possibly far off in the future, namely the state of affairs where all people on the earth are in possession of the full right of self-determination in the matter of propagation.

It should be fully realized that the complete conscious control of propagation exercised by human beings will have exceedingly far-reaching consequences, and that it is therefore quite natural

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for most people to face this development with apprehension. I think, however, that we ought to face the facts calmly and soberly.

Under the present social conditions with unemployment, house-shortage, and a hard struggle for existence on the part of the great majority, a complete control of propagation would no doubt mean a substantial decrease in the number of births, so that the population would not only remain stationary, but even decrease. This is the consequence of which all economists are so fearful. For the rulers of the capitalistic order there is really good reasons for fear. The consequence would be that the reserve forces of industry would gradually disappear. The number of workmen would be less, but, in return, more indispensable and more powerful.

An American capitalist once expressed himself in *The Nation* somewhat as follows : " I am opposing birth control among the poor. I believe it necessary for the order and prosperity of society that there be a great excess of poor people. It is possible only in proportion to their great number to keep down their wages and keep up general prosperity."

I believe he is right, if by society we understand the capitalists and by general prosperity under-

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stand the prosperity of the upper-class. That capitalists and militarists considered themselves threatened by this development is not queer ; but that is no reason why modern people, who desire war to be abolished and a better social order to be introduced, should be alarmed even if the birth-rate should fall so substantially that the population as a whole decreases in number. That it must necessarily be a terrible calamity for a people to stagnate or to reduce its number, is a dogma in which the great majority is still willing to believe. As against this another question may be asked : What benefit and pleasure do human beings obtain from being so many ? Wouldn't we be just as happy if we were a little fewer ?

"The national strength must not be impaired," is ordinarily answered. To this we may say that first of all the strength and value of the nation does not depend upon the nation consisting of as many people as possible, but rather upon these people being as able, as culturally valuable as possible—it is a question of quality and not of quantity. But besides, the desire for "strengthening the power of the nation" is the outcome of a national-egotism to which modern people with pacifistic and international minds must absolutely take exception.

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It is excellent that nations should try, in peaceful rivalry, to get as far as possible in respect of ability, prosperity and culture. But rapidly increasing populations create desire for expansion and conquest, whether it is a matter of moving the borders of the country itself or acquiring colonies. And this tendency involves a very great danger to world-peace. And as far as can be judged from the preparations made for a new war with poison-gas and aeroplanes, it looks as if a new war could endanger the whole of modern civilization.

Another argument is that a large population is required to develop the natural resources and possibilities of a country. The development of the last centuries has shown that an increase of the population means an increase of the general prosperity and a rise in the standard of living. This argument has been correct, but it is doubtful whether it can be applied any longer ! The technical evolution—the mastery of the forces in nature and our ability to develop them—has brought it about that a large population is no longer necessary to develop the natural resources of the country. On the contrary—a too big increase of population leads under the present social order to unemployment and economic difficulties which work as a direct drag upon the technical development and

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the economic and cultural progress of the country. On that account there is thus no reason to fear the consequences of a decrease in population.

Now it is a fact that the large-scale industrial evolution with machine-technique, etc., did in the beginning cause a considerable increase of the optimum-population. But a further technical development will, if anything, reduce the optimum, as the human working power can to an increasing extent be substituted by machine-power and thereby become superfluous. And in a democratic society of the future the highest possible standard of living will be demanded for all people, not only for a small upper-class.

"But full control of propagation may bring about that no children are born at all." To this I want to say that if life is so bad that nobody desires to put children into it, people had better not. But I am sure there is no danger. The propagation impulse is too strong, and the joy in life, in spite of all, too great for this. But for the capitalistic order, which offers the great majority miserable slavery conditions, it might perhaps be rather bad, if the oppressed classes declared a birth-strike. If I did not feel convinced that development is heading for a new and better social order and happier conditions for human beings,

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I should also consider the constantly falling birth-rate with apprehension. And for the power of the upper-class it does no doubt mean a serious threat if the lower-class learns how to control propagation.

Even if the population should decrease very much under the capitalistic order—e.g. to one half or even still less—I see no misfortune in that. Under a socialistic order the population will be able to increase rapidly again, if such an increase should be desirable.

Let us now turn to the actual state of affairs. In all civilized countries we find a constantly falling birth-rate, and generally it is a fact that the most advanced and cultivated countries have the lowest birth-rate, whereas the uncivilized and less cultivated peoples propagate rapidly. Isn't there a very great danger in this, which ought to be averted by all means. Undoubtedly !

But I do not believe that the danger is so great as is maintained in many quarters, as it does not, as I said before, so much depend on the quantity as on the quality.

But it is quite another matter that there is, I think, just *one method* of meeting that danger, namely by teaching *all the peoples* of the earth how to regulate the number of children and to avoid a too rapid increase of population. Those

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who have once learned to control propagation will never give it up. On the other hand they may be good examples worthy of imitation. And I think there is every reason to suppose that the example will be imitated ; it will be in furtherance of their own interests for all individuals to do so.

In this connection I shall mention briefly a thing which, as a rule, is considered as an outcome of national egotism, and which does certainly to a great extent deserve to be thus considered. It is this : that countries in which there appears to be plenty of room for more people, try to check immigration from other countries with over-population. When, for instance, the United States does not wish to open her doors widely to Italy's too rapidly growing excess of population, I cannot but find it right and just. It would be nothing but a direct invitation to planless propagation—something that should be encouraged least of all. As long as there are countries and nations where nothing is done with regard to control of the growth of population—where a tendency in that respect is on the other hand fought with all might—so long will it be completely impossible for any country to show full hospitality to the immigrants. This is a remote ideal of the future, which at any rate can only be realized when all the inhabitants of

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the earth have introduced a rational and systematic control of population increase.

The danger which is threatening our white race through the other races increasing more rapidly in numbers, can in my opinion only be met in two ways: immigration-control and the widest possible dissemination of the knowledge of contraception among all the nations of the world.

I shall be the last one to deny that the present-day tendency in the direction of birth control and the constantly falling birth-rate mean a great danger to the present social powers, capitalism, militarism and clericalism, but it is not our task to help these powers—on the contrary! But we must realize that the violent opposition which the propaganda for birth control and education with regard to prevention meets everywhere is highly understandable and natural.

Let us now briefly consider the history of civilization as a whole. Here we find a leading thread running through the entire cultural movement of mankind, namely that the conscious will of man is asserting itself more and more, constantly adding new domains to its mastery. Every step forward, every victory within this domain, however, must be won against the opposition not only of the

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natural forces but also of the great majority of human beings themselves.

It has always been a fact that the forces both inside and outside human beings which they have not been able to master have been considered as being under the dominion of the gods. An expansion of the dominion of man therefore becomes a robbery from the gods. When man brought fire into his service it was a very presumptuous attack on the omnipotence of the gods, and *Prometheus* was ingeniously punished for it.

At every step forward in appreciation and mastery of the forces in nature the same thing holds good. We are now at a stage of cultural evolution where the vital nerve itself of mankind, propagation, the main condition for the continuous existence of mankind, is about to be brought under the mastery of the conscious will. Never has any robbery from the gods been more presumptuous than this! No wonder that it causes an outcry of anger and consternation from all who have not got the courage to take up the great inherent responsibility. For with liberty and power must go responsibility and risk, and the great majority still wish, as far as is possible, to be relieved from responsibility and risk. Only a very few realize the tremendous importance of man placing propaga-

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tion under his own will; but most people feel instinctively that it is tied up with danger and risk—and they mobilize all their strength in order to fight the development.

The entire history of mankind is a series of tenacious but hopeless battles against development. Only a small minority of courageous far-sighted men place themselves on the side of development and join the fight against the great majority. But development goes on, and the conscious will of man still expands its dominion. Thus it will also no doubt happen with regard to this point, but the fight will be long and stubborn!

For as I said it is the very vital nerve of mankind which is at stake!

Procreation of human beings under conscious cultivation!—that is what we are striving at.

For modern civilized peoples there is something disgraceful in the fact that it is left to chance to decide that a new being is to come into existence. And still more disgraceful is it that in these days it is not just chance, but rather “an unlucky accident” that is the cause of the procreation of new human beings. Children come into existence not only without being deliberately desired, but directly *against* the will of the parents.

What we are striving at is that children should

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be brought into the world *because* their parents directly wish it, and *only* therefore ! The tendency is now moving in this direction, and we wish to work consciously towards the same goal. But all the reactionary forces of society fight it—they cannot help fighting it.

Most particularly have the positive religions and sects fought every advance. The priests are God's representatives on earth, and all advance is an interference with God's dominion. Here it is the question of an especially important dominion. Human beings presume to determine for themselves when new life is to be procreated ! As long as it applied only to domestic animals and plants, there was not really any objection. Compared with the animals human beings are a kind of gods ruling them. But this time it is man himself who is the subject ! They want to take under conscious control the creative power which really should belong to God alone.

The organized religious societies, the Churches, must feel their power over humanity shaken to its very foundation. Man's complete right of self-determination in the matter of propagation will surely be ruinous to the power of the Church. And the mere thought of anything so presumptuous must stir up an inner revolt in the representatives

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of the Church. In the fight for and against birth control it is really two views of life that are opposed.

\* \* \* \* \*

I shall now pass on to the importance of birth control to the problems of sex-reform. It is convenient to use the programme of the World League for Sexual Reform, and discuss the ten points in turn in order to find out what importance may be attributed to birth control in respect of each of these points.

### i. *Woman's position in society.*

Here a revolution is already under way tending towards full equality of the two sexes. It is hardly necessary to waste many words on stressing the enormous importance it has for woman that she may decide for herself whether a sex relation is to lead to procreation. Only when this right of self-determination has been fully introduced can it be said that male dominance has finally come to an end.

Opponents of the complete emancipation of woman and her equalization with man must therefore be more or less conscious opponents of birth control.

It is maintained for instance that woman will lose her innocence, her charm, the eternal feminine, etc.—all excuses for not giving up man's supremacy.

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### 2. *The liberation of marriage from the present Church and State tyranny.*

Here the right of self-determination in the matter of propagation will be of a directly revolutionary importance. That marriage exists as a basic social institution, is chiefly due to considerations for the maintenance and protection of children. Breeding of children has hitherto been the most important aim of marriage, and through regulation of marriage society has endeavoured to create a form of indirectly controlling the breeding of children. The rules of marriage have often had an effect of restraining ties on the partners ; State and Church compulsion has often forced people to remain together against their will and perhaps made life a hell for each other—but it must always be remembered that the purpose of marriage has not been to ensure the happiness of individuals, but only or chiefly to ensure the maintenance and education of the new generation. To this we may add that the rules of marriage have always had to serve the purpose of the ruling classes, and especially to ensure the mastery of man over woman. The consideration for the children has, however, constantly been the central matter. If now, by means of safe contraceptives and a sufficient dissemination of proper knowledge of them, we

succeed in rendering sexual intercourse and the procreation of children independent it will be possible in the future to pay much greater attention to the happiness of individuals and to the natural satisfaction of the sex-impulse.

Marriage will thereby obtain quite a different basis than hitherto—and it is not to be wondered at that opponents of birth control raise the cry that holy matrimony is threatened. It is! We who want sex reform believe that matrimony will be far better and happier under the new conditions—but we cannot demand that our opponents should share our belief in this, and we must therefore admit that they have every reason for apprehension.

Not only matrimony but also the whole of the previously accepted sexual morality must be shaken to their foundations, when it becomes possible consciously and voluntarily to separate sex-life from the procreation of children. No one has expressed this more clearly and sincerely than Judge Lindsey, when he says that rubber has revolutionized sexual morality. And Lindsey's proposals for marriage reform in his book "The Companionate Marriage" are bound up with contraception.

The matrimonial monopoly of legitimate sex-

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Life has been so severely undermined during recent decades that it cannot any longer count on general approval, and this is due not only to the social and economic emancipation of woman, but just as much to the extensive use of contraceptive methods.

Birth control is a necessary presumption of marriage reform in the direction expressed by the programme of the League.

Besides, birth control is already of the greatest importance to all married couples. Pregnancies following too rapidly after each other, or the fear of them, have undermined the health of innumerable women and ruined the relations between innumerable husbands and wives. Besides the revolutionary importance previously spoken about, birth control has thus the task of making life easier and happier for those who live in matrimony to-day.

### *3. Control of conception.*

Section 3 deals directly with birth control and is deliberately put in this place in order to stress its importance in the two previous sections of the programme. Here we emphasize that we wish to spread knowledge of contraceptive methods, but will fight against both abortion and the penalisation of abortion. It is an unchallenged fact that the number of criminal abortions is stupendous in

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all civilized countries. That is the most obvious indication that human beings and especially women will not any longer acquiesce in bringing unwanted children into the world. This tendency is irresistible and cannot be suppressed by threats or laws. We desire to combat the procuring of abortion, but not because we do not acknowledge woman's right to decide for herself whether she wants to give life to another child. It is simply because abortion always involves a certain danger to the life and health of the woman. And besides there is something exceedingly unpleasant in killing a live human embryo, even if it is ever so small and undeveloped. But to prevent abortion there is in our opinion only one measure available: namely, to prevent the conception of children who are not wanted by the parents.

This may be attained in two ways. One is to improve social conditions so that life will again be worth bringing children into.

The other is to spread knowledge of safe and harmless contraceptives. Both measures must be taken up simultaneously, but it is only with the latter that we are concerned about here. We unconditionally oppose the laws against abortion for the following reasons :

1. Experience shows that the threat of punish-

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ment does not prevent abortion, but renders it clandestine so that the lives and health of innumerable women are sacrificed to no good purpose.

2. The penalizing of abortion prevents physicians from interrupting pregnancy by the best and least dangerous methods.

3. The punishment operates entirely as a class-measure. Well-to-do women can always find physicians who will perform the operation on payment of a sufficiently high fee.

4. Only about one out of every 1000 of those who break the law are brought into court and punished. This has a great tendency to lower respect for criminal legislation on the whole (something to which I, by the way, have no antipathy).

5. The penalties for termination of pregnancy have no longer any relation to public opinion on the subject.

6. Compulsory motherhood, dependent on the penalisation of abortion is opposed to the League's desire that procreation of children should be a matter of free will.

Opponents of birth control often maintain that the use of contraceptives is dangerous, because, if these methods should fail in spite of all, it will

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lead to the woman concerned feeling justified in having the unwanted pregnancy terminated and being able with some justification to demand it from the physician who prescribed the contraceptive method. I do not intend to deny that this argument is partly correct. Even the most ideal contraceptive may fail for once, and a complete control of procreation is therefore dependent upon the possibility that the unwanted pregnancy may in such case be terminated harmlessly and without punishment. But that is far different from what is going on now, when criminal abortions are effected on a colossal scale *because* people do not know that there are safe contraceptive methods or do not understand how to use them. The very people who want to penalise abortion are the indirect cause of abortion occurring, because they hinder the population from gaining access to contraceptives. If knowledge of them were sufficiently widespread, contraceptives would prevent the majority of abortions, and in our opinion this is the only way to prevent them.

### 4. *Eugenics.*

In my opinion birth control is a main condition for the possibility of carrying eugenics out at all. First we must have established the self-determination right of humanity in the matter of pro-

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creation. As long as conception depends on fate or chance no human being will have the right to decide which persons are to be permitted to propagate and which not. The very idea of eugenics rests on the fundamental thought that propagation is to be submitted to the conscious will of man. Only thereby can the previous planless propagation be submitted by a rational selection that may improve the human species. Nevertheless we meet some of the most ardent opponents of birth control in the camp of eugenists. This is due to the fact that they are influenced by the present effects of voluntary child-limitation on the present stage of the movement.

Just as has been the case with all other cultural advances, voluntary child-limitation has begun among the most advanced nations and among the ablest and most intelligent classes of the population. The immediate consequence of this is that the individuals that are most valuable culturally limit the number of their children, whereas the less valuable elements propagate without limit. This must of course have a contra-selective effect and has therefore caused consternation to many eugenists. But it is very short-sighted to believe that it will therefore be a task for the eugenists to fight voluntary limitation of children. For that

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is a hopeless fight ! No, it is of importance to make the present transition stage as short as possible. This can only be attained by having the understanding of, the desire for, voluntary limitation of children permeate all the way down to the lowest layers of the population and out over the entire earth. That is a very difficult task. But contra-selection in our present-day society can only be fought that way—as well as through an improvement of social conditions in general.

It is not a good argument either against voluntary birth control that there will always be elements in the population which will never learn to avail themselves of its methods.

This is undoubtedly true—but it only means that voluntary birth control and the knowledge of contraceptives are not sufficient but must be supplemented with sterilization, partly voluntary sterilization, partly compulsory sterilization of the imbecile, the insane, and the psychopathic.

But all these precautions presume that the very right of self-determination of human beings in the matter of propagation has been generally acknowledged.

Positive eugenics, by which is understood that people with excellent heritable aptitudes breed children determinately, can only be expected

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to be put into practice to any considerable extent when the growth of the whole population has fallen so greatly that there will be room for the children of able individuals with a sense of responsibility, so that those individuals may feel justified in bringing them into the world. To invite intelligent people who do possess a sense of responsibility to bring as many children into the world as possible, under the present conditions, is hopeless. Room for them should first be obtained, and that is only possible through birth control.

### 5. *Protection of the unmarried mother and the illegitimate child.*

We demand tolerance towards free love relations. Here it is again the main condition, "*conditio sine qua non*," that sex-life and procreation of children can be separated. It is not *only* an absurd cruelty that sex-relations outside of wedlock have always been and are still to-day condemned, and that illegitimate children are made the scapegoats—which is surely unjust in the highest degree. It has previously been really useful, perhaps even necessary, to take that point of view. It must be remembered that matrimony and sexual morality have been the only forms of social control over the breeding of children. As long as it was impossible to separate

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sex-life and propagation the growth of population can only be limited by checking the free scope of the sex-life. This form of birth control is cruel to the people who suffer under it. There is now a possibility of replacing it by a modern form of birth control by means of contraceptives and sterilization. In other words, it is the main cause of sex-starvation itself that we try to get the better of by means of these measures. Prospects of unsuspected possibilities of happiness for the coming generations are unfolding themselves.

### *6. A rational attitude towards those that are unfit for matrimony.*

For this point it is of great importance that complete voluntary separation between sex-life and breeding of children be attained. Everyone has a right to a natural satisfaction of the sex-impulse, but not everyone should be allowed to propagate. Many may perhaps be well fitted to enter into marriage and find sexual satisfaction therein, even if they do not produce children. Others are perhaps possessed of aptitudes that make them unfit to live in wedlock—and nevertheless they may perhaps have other qualities for whose sake it would be desirable that they should propagate. Only the complete control of reproduction will make a basis on which to be

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able to arrange such matters. Nowadays in some states a few weak and very defective attempts in a eugenic direction are made by forbidding the marriage of people who suffer from heritable defects. Hardly any real benefit is obtained in this way. Prohibition of marriage prevents nobody from propagating, and in many cases only means that existence is made still more difficult for poor sick beings who are already badly off. Contraception and sterilization will on the other hand be able to solve these problems in the best possible way.

### 7. *Prevention of prostitution and venereal disease.*

Why does prostitution exist and what is its justification ? According to *Iwan Bloch* prostitution is a relic from the promiscuity of previous times ; but besides and chiefly its task is the one that it allows satisfaction of the sex-impulse without involving propagation. It is therefore one solution of the problem of separating sex-life from breeding of children. But it provides in a one-sided way for the sex-impulse of man and dooms a great number of women to the humiliating profession of prostitution and a still greater number of women to forced sex-abstinence.

The problems which prostitution attempts to solve must therefore be solved in some other way

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if prostitution itself is to be abolished. Inclination for promiscuity will probably decrease along with the progress of civilization, but even if there remain some people who desire promiscuity, it is not necessary for that reason to maintain the *professional* prostitute for hire.

The other problem, however, the separation of sex-life from propagation, can be solved through the application of contraceptives, and contraception will therefore also be a chief condition for the abolition of prostitution. Prostitution is besides an outcome of the dominance of man over woman in sex-affairs. In this respect contraception will also have an effect by emancipating woman entirely and thus put an end to the dominance of man.

As far as venereal diseases are concerned, it has often been mentioned that birth control will lead to freer sex-intercourse, and that it must necessarily bring about a tremendous expansion of venereal diseases. It must be admitted that perhaps there would seem to be a danger in that connection. Experience shows otherwise, however. I will just mention an example which I have from *Dr. Graaz* in Berlin. He is physician to a juvenile group for "Körperkultur" (body-culture) consisting of about 6000 young people

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of both sexes. Among these young people the knowledge of contraceptives has been spread. But for six years not a single case of venereal disease has appeared. Why not?

Simply because these young people, through their endeavours for body culture, have been led to keep free of all prostitution and alcohol. For it is a fact that prostitution is a sure and constant source of infection and ensures the propagation of venereal diseases. Abolish prostitution, and preferably also its accomplice alcohol! and it will become comparatively easy for the medical science of to-day to put an end to venereal diseases. All that contributes to the abolition of prostitution will thus also contribute to the combatting of venereal diseases.

### *8. Abnormal forms of the sex-impulse.*

One might perhaps think that birth control would have no importance in this connection. Aberrant forms of sex-impulse and their satisfaction do not, it is true, result in procreation. But what we desire is to have aberrant sexual forms recognized as aberrant, but nevertheless as completely natural phenomena with which neither society as a whole nor other people as individuals are entitled to interfere. That homosexuality or other forms of sex-acts have been and still are considered

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by the great majority as abominable and punishable, is mainly due to the fact that we are here facing a form of sex-life that does not bring about the natural consequences of normal sex-life, namely procreation. The standpoint of the Church, as we know, is this that all sex-life is sinful when not having procreation as its end.

And the accepted sexual morality still adheres to that point of view. A universal knowledge of contraception will gradually lead to the abolition of the association of ideas of sexual intercourse and procreation, and thereby the most essential reason for considering for instance homosexuality as a vice or sin will vanish.

*9. A criminal code that does not interfere with the voluntary sex-relations of adults.*

Similar views may be held in connection with point 9. We desire that the right of society to interfere with the sex-life of adults be limited to the cases where either one of the partners needs protection on account of youth or intellectual defect, or where the interests of third parties are at stake. The third party will in most cases be the child which may result from the sex-relation. A complete separation of sex-life and propagation will thus in a great majority of cases make penalties and other measures on the part of society super-

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fluous. And it will be possible to permit certain sex-relations on the condition that procreation is avoided.

### 10. *Systematic sexual education.*

As far as the question of sex-information and education is concerned in our days it is especially information on the subject of contraceptives that is in demand. And this information, in which most people wish to share, leads somehow to further sex-information. It contributes extensively to dragging the sex-problems into the lime-light and out of the darkness of concealment.

By discussing our programme for sex-reform I have tried to point out the importance of birth control as a condition for all sex-reforms. I hope you have not been given the impression that I believe that birth control *alone* could pave the road for a sex-reform, to say nothing about calling it forth. On the other hand I shall not deny that I am of opinion that *without birth control* sex-reform will not be practicable at all. It is and must be a principal condition for the attainment of our aims.

It follows that contraceptive technique itself is of the greatest possible importance. It is of no great use to talk of controlling reproduction and separating sex-life and propagation if we

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cannot simultaneously offer safe and easy means to attain that end. It must be said at once that a perfectly ideal contraceptive does not exist as yet. We have got so far, however, that we can offer people contraceptives 99 per cent. safe, and which are sufficiently easy for everyone to be able to learn them.

The best known and most used contraceptives are the condom and coitus interruptus. The constantly falling birth-rate is no doubt chiefly the result of voluntary limitation of children by means of these methods. They are, however, very defective and unreliable, and not wholly harmless either. And besides, it is the male who is responsible for the prevention in case of either method. And that is not really just to the female. Undeniably woman is the one who is most interested in prevention and needs most to be able to feel secure. And a prevention which is exclusively based upon the man, does not solve the problem of emancipating woman entirely in sex-affairs.

But it is very fortunate that under the modern form of prevention, which is much more safe than the ones previously used, it is the female part who takes care of protecting herself.

To a contraceptive the following demands must be made :

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1. It must give absolute (or almost absolute) safety.
2. It must be absolutely harmless.
3. It must be so cheap and so easy that every woman can make use of it.

These three conditions are so far fulfilled by the occlusive pessary best of all, when the correct model and size is used. According to unanimous experience in England, America and Denmark it is about 99 per cent. safe. Harmlessness is practically absolute. And it is also cheap. Likewise it can be used by practically every woman ; but it is not so easy and plain as could be desired. A certain carefulness on the part of the woman is required and expert instruction is necessary. How this is to be put into effect you will get opportunity to hear when *Dr. Norman Haire* speaks in a little while. *Norman Haire* is one of the physicians who have the greatest experience of contraception in the world.<sup>1</sup>

It would be desirable and of the greatest importance if we could invent a still easier and safer form of prevention. To this end an " International Medical Group for the Investigation of Birth Control " was formed at Geneva in 1927 with its

<sup>1</sup> Compare " The Comparative Value of Current Contraceptive Methods " and " Some more Medical Views on Birth Control," by *Norman Haire, Ch.M., M.B.*

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domicile in London. This group was reorganized and expanded in 1929 under the style of "International Medical Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Contraception," which is now to co-operate with the Scientific Committee in Moscow that has for its main object to test all contraceptives and find out the best method.

The solution of this problem is now eagerly worked at in many places in the world. *Dr. Graefenberg* in Berlin has for many years worked with some intrauterine pessaries, which seem to possess great advantages. Many physicians in various countries have taken up this method for closer investigation. *Dr. Haberlandt* at Innsbruck, and various American scientists, attempt to bring out hormonal preparations which should prevent the eggs from maturing and erupting from the ovaries. In Russia they are, among other things, working on an "antispermin," which is to prevent the sperms from having a fructifying effect. Whether it will be the one or the other method, or perhaps something entirely new, that solves the problem at last, I shall not venture to forecast. But one thing is certain, that it will be of the most profound importance to obtain still better and easier forms for prevention of pregnancy.

However, for the present, we shall have to work

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with the best that is at our disposal. And the occlusive pessaries are, at any rate, so good that we can go on with them until something still better turns up.

It is of paramount importance that we who have the opportunity to get practical experience in the matter of contraceptives should try to work up our experiences in order to get the best possible result that way. For the individual investigator it is impossible to test more than a few methods. We therefore find that each one is inclined to praise just his method as the best one. But that does not matter a great deal. A certain degree of one-sidedness is useful insofar as the individual methods are thereby thoroughly tested. But it is very regrettable that there is a tendency not only to proclaim one's own method as the best one, but at the same time to declare the methods of all others as quite useless. I know from experience that this is easily done. If one has had a few bad experiences with one method, one is inclined to discard it completely. But no one is justified in judging on the basis of a few negative cases, if for instance others are able to show a far greater number of positive ones. And in a domain like this so many factors enter into the question that very large numbers must be tested before it is

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possible to make reliable deductions. And, besides, the value of contraceptives often depends upon small technical points which thus become exceedingly important. The tubes of paste which I have seen and tried have always, as a rule, been defective. Others think that such a paste is the best of all means. They may perhaps have access to better kinds of paste than I know of. There are many who maintain that pessaries are absolutely useless—the women cannot learn to use them—they check the pleasure of intercourse, etc. It is a fact that in the matter of pessaries the technical element plays a decisive part. The many bad experiences have probably been made with bad forms of pessaries. The spring in the rim must have a definite elasticity—every woman must have just the correct size, and the correction instruction as to its use. In this way excellent results can be obtained. *Hannah Stone* in New York, *Norman Haire* in London, and I here in Copenhagen, have each of us in several thousands of cases with almost the same kind of pessary, attained 96–99 % safety, and practically any woman can learn to use the pessary. In the face of this it means nothing that others have had bad results with bad pessaries. But it does not follow either that other methods will not possibly turn out still better.

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As I said, international co-operation is absolutely necessary! Let everyone work on the method he finds best. But we are not justified on the basis of our own bad experiences to discard methods which in the experience of others are good.

It is very important that *physicians* take up this task not only to secure the best possible contraceptive technique, but also to see that the population is educated with regard to the correct contraceptives.

Otherwise people will get *all* their information through private-capitalistic business-men who have no other purpose than to make money.

There is a very great craving among people for such information, and this craving offers smart business-men good chances. The market is flooded with more or less useless preventives that are all praised as "absolutely safe." When advertising they often imitate our educative articles, and often use the names of people who are known as propagandists for birth control. At the entrances to the meetings that we hold, they distribute advertising material for a "never-failing syringing remedy", and in the advertising columns of the illustrated weeklies, for instance, I now and then find my own name: "Dr. Leunbach says:" Thereafter follows a little quotation from one of

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my writings and finally : " Every woman should therefore buy . . ." etc.

These contraceptives are as a rule quite valueless, as all that the businessman cares is that he gets two shillings for a preparation which has cost a penny to make. He need not be afraid that it will soon become obvious that the remedy does not fulfil expectations. Those who have been fooled and have suffered disappointments have no way of making it known to the public. It is only a matter of spending the money which effective advertisement costs. A much favoured illustration of the wonderfully safe results to be obtained from the remedy is a stork with its wings tied. In the last of these pictures that I have seen, the poor stork was entirely wrapped up in heavy rope so that it could hardly breathe.

In addition to these ineffectual, but as a rule also harmless, remedies many dangerous and harmful instruments are on sale, which often distinguish themselves by not being preventive at all, but on the other hand abortive. As this is punishable, however, they are sold as contraceptive means. Here it is exclusively the chance of making money that makes private business-people much prefer to sell these dangerous and expensive instruments to selling the good and

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harmless, but at the same time cheap, pessaries.

In this country the so-called "obturator" (system Schubert), known in English as the "wish-bone" pessary, is in great favour. It is an intracervical pessary, which does not prevent the sperm from entering into the uterus, but which offers a good chance of interrupting a pregnancy during the first months and, in addition, of producing inflammation of the uterus. It is preferably made in gold and is sold at  $2\frac{1}{2}$  guineas. When you are told that the goldsmith who makes the obturator and supplies the gold himself, gets ten shillings, it is evident that it is a fine business for the one who sells it. And the high price has not a discouraging effect on the customers—on the contrary! They think that such an expensive object made of gold must absolutely be better than a rubber cap priced at a few shillings.

In order to attract customers still further attention is called to its pregnancy-interrupting quality through the following cunning remark: "In case of pregnancy it is forbidden to use the obturator as it will otherwise be interrupted."

Also the publication of "informative pamphlets" may become a good business if only the advertising is sufficiently smart. Here it is also in great favour to quote the names of well-known authorities.

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Thus a pamphlet was recently published in this city with the following words on the front page : " Published on the occasion of Thit Jensen's and Dr. Leunbach's propaganda." <sup>1</sup> Who would imagine that this pamphlet was published by a man with whom we have refused to work together ?

As it appears from the programme of this congress that I was to read this paper to-day, I have received requests from manufacturers of chemical contraceptives to recommend these remedies in my paper. Samples have been sent to me with offers of larger quantities of samples so that all the delegates of the congress could be supplied.

Between the lines an indication may be sensed that a recommendation at an opportunity like the one to-day would be so pleasant to the manufacturer that it might be rewarded with something more than just a few free samples.

In this connection I would refer to a very valuable book which I have received, namely " Geburtenregelung," published by *Dr. Kurt Bendix*, Berlin, on behalf of the " Birth Control Committee."

The whole problem is here discussed from many

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Thit Jensen's name is known in Denmark somewhat as Dr. Marie Stopes's is in England.

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angles in various articles. I take the liberty of translating an extract from *Richard Linsert's* statement as a completion of my own statements :

" In other cases the initials of doctor's names are used, or scientific opinions are quoted which, it must be said, are intended in form and contents to mislead the reader. In one case the analysis was stated, and it was declared that the effect of the chemical was highly fatal to sperms. When a well-known laboratory declares a thing like that, the unenlightened easily draw the conclusion that *all* sperms are killed by means of that remedy. In another case it ran : ' Under constant control of Professor Dr. Y,' and afterwards it turned out that the controller was a doctor of philosophy, who received a small monthly remuneration for lending his name and whose ' control ' was confined to the profits obtained from the undertaking. And it even involves a danger when a physician accepts a number of samples in order to make experiments with them. In a little while there may be a statement : ' Submitted to Dr. X of the Y Institute for testing.' And when one makes systematic compilations for scientific reasons as to the working methods and procedure of the individual remedies, one should not be surprised at receiving pamphlets stating that the remedy

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Y is 'under the constant control of Dr. X.' They are surely all mere trifles ; but they mislead the public so incredibly that it is the duty of those who know to call attention to these irregularities. When misguiding statements of names, composition, and opinions do not produce the desired result, statements of fantastically manipulated figures are added. One dealer praises his safety suppositories of which he claims to have sold sixty million pieces since such and such a date. The public naturally thinks that the remedy must be good when such a quantity has been sold. A wholesale merchant conversant with the line enlightened me on the calculation-key of this advertising-practician : the figure sixty millions did not refer to packages, but to individual suppositories ! Sixty million suppositories equal five million packages ! 'And still this figure,' thinks my informant, "is still exaggerated by the ten-fold.' "

I have mentioned these examples to show you that in addition to the difficulties we meet by direct opposition from clerical and conservative quarters and by passive opposition from the press, the conditions under which sex educational work must be done in a private-capitalistic society are very difficult. We competent medical authorities

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cannot avail ourselves of the same arresting forms of advertisement as dealers do without arousing a storm of scandal ; and even if we should disregard the scandal we are excluded from doing so because advertising costs too much money. It pays only for those who use it to sell valueless goods at high prices.

Nevertheless it might be worth while considering whether we could not get business-advertising, which is so powerful and so energetic, to work for the spread of reliable information. If a contraceptive still better than the one we have now should be found, a remedy which could really be used at once even by the most unintelligent and culturally lowest individuals, it would be of profound importance to spread knowledge of that remedy over the whole world as rapidly as possible. In such case we should not hesitate to let private business-men earn money by taking care of the dissemination of such knowledge. It is true that the said cultural good would thereby easily cost the single individual more than necessary. That does not matter so much, however, considering what a tremendous good it really is. That a number of private capitalists thereby obtained undeserved profits would, of course, have to be put up with. Of course, it would be another nuisance that the

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scientists and propagandists who vouched for the new remedy and worked for its dissemination would inevitably be accused of doing it in order to make money. That is already said about us quite often. But after all only a few will be the sufferers—and if the cause can profit thereby, it does not matter !

At any rate—propaganda in some form or other is required !

You will have understood from the above that I attribute a far-reaching and revolutionary importance to birth control. When it is desired to do propaganda for birth control, I think such arguments should not be used, however. They might rather have a deterrent effect the opposite of that desired. It is necessary to use arguments that can be understood by everyone—and there certainly are more than enough of them !

Under the present social order there is practically not a single family that would not wish to limit the number of its children. Even if they would actually like very much to have as many children as possible, economic conditions are simply prohibitive to their desire. The lack of birth control exists—the lack requires no propaganda ! I therefore believe that the best form of propaganda is true and open information regarding the really

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good and harmless contraceptives. But information alone is not enough! Still more important it is to supply the population with facilities for learning the use of occlusive pessaries or other remedies.

Here in Denmark I have taken the procedure first of all to speak to medical men and women. The matter has been discussed in the medical journals, and instructive articles on contraceptive technique have been written. At a meeting of physicians I have raised the question and everywhere in the country, where I have given popular lectures on birth control, I have called on my colleagues and talked to them about it. In many places I have on the day subsequent to my lecture given a consultation together with one or more of the physicians of the place, and have thus introduced them into the instruction-technique. Thereby it has been attained that everywhere in the country there are physicians who are willing to give such instruction and to whom we can refer when people in the country ask us for advice. I attribute great importance—at any rate in view of the form of prevention to which we are confined at present—to the physicians taking the matter up.

It is true that there has been some opposition, and the majority of the physicians are still in-

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different or averse to the cause. But on the whole I think that I have found support within the profession, especially among the younger physicians. Most opposition is from university professors and other authorities and gynecologists, in spite of the fact that these, more than others, have opportunity to see women with ruined health due to abortions and too frequent births.

In other respects the propagandists for birth control have naturally had the same experience in this country as in others—first an outcry of scandal and indignation when Mrs. Thit Jensen (the Danish Marie Stopes) started her propaganda five years ago, but at the same time very great interest and approval on the part of the public. Opposition has gradually declined very much but still manifests itself in protest from Church quarters, attempts to have our lectures forbidden, etc.

As far as the propaganda is concerned I believe that in relation with the physicians medical indications for prevention should be especially paid attention to. And then to the increase of criminal abortions which destroy the lives or health of many women and which are fought most effectively through pregnancy-prevention.

To the general population the mere economic advantage to the individual families should be

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pointed out. It will most certainly be a kind of agitation for refraining from having children. But in view of the present social conditions I do not consider this a calamity. And if social misery could in that way contribute to bring about the cultural progress which the human right of self-determination in the matter of propagation means, some good would come from it after all.

And the regard for the health of woman and her possibility of sharing the benefits of culture are especially good arguments. On the other hand I do not think that the great consequences for the whole cultural development, which I have particularly emphasized in this lecture, should be mentioned or stressed in the ordinary agitation. It is useful to face the full truth and bear in mind what consequences the movement involves. But most people will rather shrink from these possibilities of the future. Our opponents use exactly the same arguments against us. I dare say there are only a few of them who make the matter entirely clear to themselves. But the rulers of the State and the Church feel instinctively that it would be fatal to their power if people should learn how to control propagation for themselves. Therefore they fight us. But they use arguments which, as a rule, are only excuses, and which are often

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positively incorrect, e.g. that contraceptives are harmful, and cause cancer or other illnesses. Such arguments are very easy to counter.

On the whole it is very difficult for our opponents to state reasonable arguments and to take up a really consistent standpoint. If you get alone with an opponent of birth control it is, as a rule, very easy to drive him into a corner effectively ; and most often he will stop the discussion by going away.

In conclusion, I will review briefly the present position of the movement in the various countries. There are certain differences which strike me as indicative of the psychology of the various nations.

In the United States the "American Birth Control League," with *Margaret Sanger* at its head, is working very energetically. The movement has got a forceful support from the now world known Judge *Ben Lindsey*, of Denver, whose books cause a great sensation everywhere. In America they recommend especially the occlusive pessary, and it is expressly stressed that this form of prevention is the best also for the reason that *woman* learns to protect herself and thereby becomes freer and more independent. In England and Denmark the state of affairs on that point is just as in America. But just as the propaganda is made

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on the largest scale and most energetically in the United States, it has also to face the greatest difficulties there, e.g. the "Comstock Law," which prohibits mailing not only of contraceptives but also of all printed matters in which contraceptives are mentioned..

In Germany arguments for and against birth control run high. Here the agitation has to a higher degree than in the above mentioned countries dealt with interruption of pregnancy and abolition of punishment. German physicians have published large books on this problem, and have with excellent arguments established the necessity of abolishing the penalties—but without mentioning contraceptives in a word. And when contraceptives are recommended in Germany, it is as a rule either the remedies which are to be used by the male, or such forms of pessaries which have to be placed in position by the physician and which the women cannot place themselves.

I cannot divest my mind of the idea that the male German advocates of birth control have a difficulty in taking the full consequences of the claim for self-determination right over propagation, namely that above all it is *woman* who is to have that right of self-determination.

When, for instance, *Mr. Ferch* in Vienna main-

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tains that the women in Vienna are far too unintelligent to be able to learn to place the occlusive pessary themselves—and when most physicians in Germany prefer small pessaries of celluloid or of metal (which have to be put in place by the physician) to the vaginal pessaries, which are used by the women themselves in America, England, and Holland—I see in this a more or less conscious fear of giving the contraceptives to the women themselves. Only very few German masculine doctors, as for instance *Hirschfeld* and *Hodann*, have taken up the Anglo-Saxon attitude.

In Russia the position seems to be like that in Germany. As is well known, they have abolished the punishment for interruption of pregnancy and thereby rid abortion of most of its dangers. But in spite of the fact that nobody will deny that abortion in itself is not desirable, and that the most effective remedy to avoid abortion is a widespread knowledge of contraceptives, the authorities in Russia do not seem to be particularly eager to spread that knowledge. It seems as if they are afraid of giving to the individual, especially to the woman, the full right of self-determination. In my opinion this is a great mistake and a lack of consistency in a revolutionary course of thinking. Even if it should be maintained that in a com-

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munistic society the interests of society should go before the interests of the individual—birth control is thus to be practised according to the needs of society and not according to the pleasure of the individual—it is nevertheless an entirely wrong tendency to endeavour to maintain a kind of birth compulsion by means of ignorance as to prevention.

The technique of contraception must be considered like steam power and electricity as a material condition for the further development of civilization. Just as it is inconsistent with Marxian thought that a few workmen should destroy a machine because it has happened to throw them out of employment, so it is wrong to be unwilling to spread the knowledge of the contraceptive means for fear of a momentary reduction of the growth of population or because it is feared that individuals might use them selfishly.

During the summer of 1929 I was in Moscow myself and ascertained that there conditions with regard to prevention of pregnancy have undergone an essential improvement of late. A neomalthusian movement does not exist in Russia, which is quite understandable in a country where they attempt to build up a socialistic society. But contraception is considered the best remedy for

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prevention of abortions and is therefore a subject of propaganda. The physicians are taught contraceptive technique and a committee has been appointed for the special purpose of studying contraceptives and if possible of improving them. The remedies approved by the State are advertised in the State papers and are on sale at the State shops.

Soviet Russia is thus the only country where the State itself has taken contraception in hand, submitted it to medical research, and directly spreads knowledge thereof.

In the Southern European countries where the Catholic Church has a considerable power and influence, the movement for birth control is badly off. The Catholic Church is, on the whole, the most consistent and frank opponent of any sex-reform. In Italy the Church has got an ally in *Mussolini*, whose attitude is unmistakable.

France has previously been a leading country as far as the limitation of children is concerned. After the War France has unfortunately been bent upon strengthening her military position and encouraging a growth of population. An act was therefore passed in 1920 which imposes penalties for advocating birth control or for giving advice with regard to means of prevention.

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If we look out over the world we do find, it is true, that in all British colonies and dominions the question of birth control is openly discussed, chiefly among the white population, however. The great majority of the inhabitants of the earth are still practically untouched by this movement.

It is thus just a small part of the inhabited world, namely Northern Europe and North America where there may be said to be any real movement in favour of birth control. And here, too, the movement meets a tremendous opposition on the part of State as well as Church and public opinion. Among the classes where the use of contraception would be of real benefit, ignorance, house-shortage and poverty are chief hindrances to its expansion. There would thus be every reason for being pessimistic as to the probability of ever being able to attain the ideal of the future : the full right of self-determination of all people in the matter of propagation.

Nevertheless I am confident that mankind will someday reach that end, because I consider it a necessary consequence of technical development and the progress of civilization.

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### ABORTION AND STERILIZATION IN DENMARK.<sup>1</sup>

AT last year's congress I had the honourable duty of reading the introductory paper at the meeting dealing with birth control. To-day I shall not repeat anything of what I said on that occasion, but shall content myself with a reference to the report of the Copenhagen Congress, which contains many other contributions to the subject besides my own. Birth control furnishes so wide and important a theme that it cannot be examined exhaustively from all angles on one congress day ; we have, therefore, this year also placed it on our programme as one of the main topics of discussion.

At the present moment I shall restrict myself to the question of abortion, and, in conclusion, sketch quite briefly a Danish Act recently passed with regard to sterilization.

So far as abortion is concerned, I believe that the conditions in the various Western European countries show a very large degree of resemblance, so that the conditions in Denmark can be said to

<sup>1</sup>Read before the Third Congress of the World League for Sexual Reform in London.

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be fairly typical and to depart only to a small extent from the conditions in other countries at the same cultural level.

As in all other countries with the exception of the Soviet-Union, the criminal code of Denmark provides severe penalties against the procuration of abortion.

The penalties apply both to the woman herself and to anyone who may assist her. The mere direction of a woman to a place where she can supposedly have an abortion produced is a punishable offence. The heaviest penalties apply to the professional abortionist, which means that a doctor risks a higher penalty than the woman herself or an unskilled non-professional helper.

In spite of the severity of the penalties the number of abortions is steadily increasing, and it is only extremely rarely that the provisions of the law are applied. The actual state of affairs is winked at so far as possible.

The hospitals treat daily many cases of intentional (so-called criminal) abortion. The doctors do know that the majority of abortions are intentional, but they are unwilling to pursue the matter further. They have no desire for certainty, for obviously it would never occur to a doctor to report a patient to the police.

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The patients are discharged without receiving any instruction as to methods of contraception. Neither by the hospitals nor by the great majority of private practitioners is anything whatever done to prevent or hinder the same patients from returning time after time with repeated abortions.

Now and then it is discovered that a nurse, a midwife, or some other medically unqualified person has set up as an abortionist on a large scale. It is as a rule the fatal termination of a postabortive sepsis that leads to the discovery. A law-suit follows in which a number of women appear either as witnesses or defendants. The end of the matter is that the professional abortionist is sent to prison for several years. Meanwhile the affair is reported in the press and becomes a subject of gossip among the women of the community. A large number of hitherto ignorant women gather in this way the information that it is possible to get help of this kind in such cases when the occasion arises, and the luckier abortionists who have succeeded in avoiding discovery are in greater demand than ever.

The women who have terminated their pregnancies escape as a rule with a caution and a strong reprimand from the judge, and next time they must seek help elsewhere. That they are

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let off so easily is probably due to the fear on the part of the authorities that the carrying out of punishment that the law demands would cause too much of a sensation and would direct public attention to the precarious conditions to which the provisions give rise.

In the last generation in Denmark only two medical practitioners have been punished for production of abortion, and these cases occurred many years ago before the real abortion epidemic had begun to spread. It is only in the last ten years that abortion has assumed the form of a real social evil.

According to the letter of the law interruption of pregnancy is strictly speaking always punishable. But nevertheless it has been the custom for the doctor to terminate a pregnancy in cases where the woman's health would otherwise be very much menaced. After all, it will therefore always be dependent on the doctor's judgment whether or no the pregnancy shall be interrupted.

Medical work in these days bears every mark of being carried on as a private capitalistic occupation. It therefore comes about that a woman who is high enough up in the social scale, or is able to pay a sufficiently high fee, can persuade some doctor or other to invent the medical indica-

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tions necessary for the termination of an undesired pregnancy. The precise social or financial status required for the attainment of this end differ considerably in the various countries ; but there is a certain tendency everywhere for the limits in these respects to become lower so that this expedient will become available to a steadily increasing number of women from the upper and middle classes.

When the doctors maintain that they will have nothing to do with the termination of pregnancy on social grounds, this must be taken to mean that poverty is *not* regarded as an adequate indication, while wealth, on the other hand, *is*. There is no denying that this is hardly what we could desire in the way of recognized social grounds for the induction of abortion. But society is not yet organized in the way that most of us could wish.

In Denmark it is necessary to be fairly high up the scale and to be well provided with funds in order that an abortion may be carried out easily and smoothly. I believe that the reason is partly that the Danish profession as a whole is really well circumstanced so that there are no Danish doctors who have to choose such a dangerous means of earning their daily bread. But on the other hand, if it is a question of a countess, of the wife

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of a wealthy business magnate, or of the daughter of a lord, the risk is so small and the honour and reward so large that it requires a really well-grounded moral conviction to refuse to help such a patient. Every woman has some bodily ailment that, at all events with a little trouble, can be construed as a medical indication for the termination of her pregnancy.

It would be simply foolish to be scandalized at this state of affairs. Even the stoutest refusal on the part of the doctor will be inadequate to ensure the victory of either the moral or the criminal law. When once a woman has got into her head the idea of doing away with her unborn child, she will somehow contrive to carry her intention into practice, even if in no other way than by seeking the necessary help abroad. The result will be that the home doctor by his firmness has not merely allowed a nice little sum to slip out of his hands, but has caused the money to be sent abroad to the benefit of a rival neighbouring state. Thus, from the point of view of national economy, the doctor's conduct in such a case is seen to be absolutely reprehensible.

In such a case the individual doctor is, in fact, powerless to prevent the criminal procedure, so why should he therefore not avail himself of

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the goodwill, gratitude, and wealth of a patient who is most likely to combine influence with charm?

If a dog is sent by his master to the baker's for a basket of bread and on the way home is attacked by other dogs so that it is beyond his power to save the bread, what can be urged against him if he yields to the temptation of sharing the dainty repast? I cannot see the right of putting the blame on the individual: the responsibility rests jointly with the existing capitalistic social order, with the prevailing class morality, and with the present criminal code.

Twenty to thirty years ago there used to happen what used to be called "a respectable accident." By this was meant a child who was brought into the world in all secrecy by a young girl from a respectable and well-to-do home, where there were sufficient means to ensure that the whole affair could be carried through with the completest discretion, so that the family honour was saved. At that time pregnancy was regarded as a condition from the natural course of which there was no way of escape.

Nowadays, on the contrary, women have realized that it is not absolutely necessary to abandon themselves to their fates, that there is a way of warding off the blow and by taking the law into

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their own hands, as it were, of avoiding the altogether disproportionately serious consequences of a little pardonable frivolity. The old concept of a "respectable accident," practically speaking, no longer exists. In these days a "respectable accident" will in the truest sense become an abortion and vanish before the end of the third month of pregnancy.

The protest on the part of women against giving birth to unwanted children has thus achieved a decisive victory within a restricted social class. But this protest against undesired births has spread with overwhelming rapidity through the whole social scale. That it is still far from being through to complete victory is due neither to the lack of will on the part of the nation's women nor to moral scruples regarding the justifiability of trying to escape the consequences of sinful lust. On the contrary it is due entirely to the women's lack of power to carry through their purpose.

The law sets a heavy penalty on the procuration of abortion and therefore the doctors and the public hospitals refuse to give their support. As a consequence the women try to help themselves. If we had at our disposal some certain harmless and readily accessible method of terminating pregnancy not many unwanted children would

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ever see the light. But such a method we have not had up to the present.

I believe, however, that it will not be long before we have at our disposal a remedy that is so easily applicable and so absolutely harmless that every doctor can use it, and feel justified in using it, in the home of the woman so that a stay at a hospital or a clinic can be avoided.

I have for some time worked with such a remedy myself, and expect that it will be of great importance in the future. The remedy was invented by the German chemist, Heiser, who after having helped more than 11,000 women to get rid of an unwanted pregnancy was sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

The method is this: that an antiseptic paste is inserted in the uterus. The pregnancy is thereby terminated and the embryo is expelled in the course of one or two days, just as in the case of a regular abortion. In Heiser's 11,000 cases there has not been a single case of death, neither any other complications; and any after-treatment is not reported to have been necessary in any case.

In a few cases where I have applied the method and where the patients have been under observation by other doctors at a clinic, the method has turned out successful. It is the intention to have the

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method thoroughly tested in a greater number of cases before publication of the results. The composition of the remedy is still Heiser's trade secret and perhaps has not yet arrived at its final state. It will probably not be long before this method will be commonly known. And I believe that it will contribute to making the penalties unmaintainable.

Thus, there is not yet a ready possibility of getting an abortion produced. Therefore—and for this reason only, not on grounds of "respect for the unfolding life" or of fear of punishment—it is possible to continue to compel the women to bring children into the world against their wills.

Such at all events are the conditions in Denmark and other Scandinavian countries, and also in Germany. Presumably they are the same in England, in U.S.A. and also in France—in a word, throughout the whole domain of northern European culture.

In markedly Roman Catholic countries of Southern Europe the Church has perhaps so firm a control of morals that the protest against unwanted children may be suppressed for a number of years to come, but it is only a question of time as to how long the protest can really be held back.

Now the conditions I have just pictured

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are in a state of *fundamental instability*, but an instability no greater than that of so many other conditions in society organized on private capitalistic lines. Here as in so many other spheres the workers are the sufferers, these poor and exploited masses that have beforehand to bear the hardest loads.

And it is on the weaker half of the working class, namely, the working women, that the blow of compulsory childbirth falls most heavily.

The upper class man may dismiss the problem with a pleasant smile, but then he is not affected by it in the slightest. Upper class *women* do not escape both bodily and psychic damage, but these can be got over. The working class man is oppressed by the claims of a large family and an ailing life, but *it is the working woman who has to bear the full weight of the burden*.

There is, however, a difference of the greatest significance between the problem of abortion and most other social problems. Most of the unjust and unstable conditions that arise from the capitalistic social order can be removed only by the overthrow of that social order in favour of a new and better one.

But on the contrary there exists at all events a *theoretical* possibility of a more or less satisfactory

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solution of the abortion problem even within the limits of a capitalistic society.

Let us go straight to the root of the matter and investigate the actual causes of the evils we wish to combat:

The driving force is the *Women's protest against giving birth to unwanted children.*

The desire for the right of self-determination in the matter of reproduction is, as I also maintained in last year's congress, a cultural advance of first-rate importance and a necessary step in general cultural development to which we can but give the warmest welcome. Any attempt to oppose this human development and progress may well be left to clerical, fascist, and other reactionary forces. Our problem shall be to spread the knowledge of contraceptive methods so widely that undesired pregnancies will occur only quite exceptionally. This is the most radical and thoroughgoing means of combating abortion. It is the best and most commendable way.

But we must bear clearly in mind that this will not be sufficient to meet the needs of our present actual situation. For contraceptive methods are not as yet sufficiently perfect and simple, and it must necessarily be many years before the object can be achieved in this way.

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On the other hand, we can accomplish making available to all women practically as good help as is at present available to the minority in the upper classes. We are, practically speaking, at all events in the more advanced of the countries within our cultural circle, in a position to provide for any woman who wishes to procure an abortion the help necessary for the carrying out of her purpose in such a way that the danger to her health and well-being is insignificant.

This is the line that has been taken in Soviet Russia, and there it has proved possible to arrive at a tolerably satisfactory solution in this way. In Russia, however, the number of trained doctors and hospitals is too small to make it possible up to the present to stamp out the dangerous unregulated abortion completely. But in spite of this they can point to undeniably excellent results.

In the northern and western countries of Europe it would, on the other hand, be possible to provide all women with the necessary help if only the required amendment of the law could be made.

But, after all, is this a thing that lies entirely outside the bounds of possibility? Could it not be carried through even in a capitalistic society?

This question cannot be answered with a plain yes or no. For every day sees an increase in the

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number of those who, while not giving their consent to socialistic ideas or to our sex reform programme in general, nevertheless rank themselves with us when we bring forward a demand for the removal of the legal penalties attaching to abortion.

When we discuss this problem with folk who have not previously given it their close attention we invariably at once encounter the objection : " But aborticide means the destruction of a developing human life and to that we can never give our consent."

This is the same fundamental error that we always meet whenever we oppose any criminal legislation—the assumption that denouncing the punishment is synonymous with approving the crime.

Time after time we meet the same kind of objection from otherwise well-intentioned people : " How can you possibly bring yourself to be an advocate of perversion, incest, adultery, and aborticide ? "

Among the greater majority there prevails a deep-seated, simple, superstitious idea that it is appropriate and just that the arm of the law should reach out to all those whose actions we do not like. I believe that this is a natural consequence of the whole psychological foundation

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on which the social sense of justice rests. In my opinion the French sociologist, Durkheim, and his school deserve great credit for having shed new light on this relationship. In spite of Durkheim's opinions being quite different from ours, I believe that in this connection we may cite him as an authority in our favour. We are likewise greatly indebted to Bertrand Russell for his work in this field. And we are fortunate enough to count him among our number.

In order to be in a position to understand why the procuration of abortion should be punished we must first and foremost be clear as to why human beings should punish each other at all, and why they should regard punishment as both reasonable and just.

Nowadays it is certainly the rule to attempt to establish a rational justification for the imposition of penalties on peculiar actions.

But all the same it is probable that it was not at all a rational argument that led to the original introduction of these codes of penalties.

It must be regarded as particularly commendable that in recent times there has been an attempt to found criminal laws on a rational basis with regard to the interests of society and so on.

And it is just this increasing tendency towards

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a rational outlook that gives us some amount of hope of achieving something in our fight against certain provisions of the penal code.

The spread of adequate information as to how little good and how much harm a penal provision may produce cannot fail to make an impression on persons who are at all capable of thought on the matter.

Most likely we could get more people to admit that if it should be desirable to further the increase of population it should not be endeavoured to obtain this by punishing the women who protest against bringing unwanted children into the world. It is a bad way, and a way that is too cheap, to try to fulfil one's duty towards the coming generations. The sound and culturally valuable women should be encouraged to increase the number of sound and able beings and they should be directly awarded for this public-spirited act.

There is thus a hope that we shall manage to get the support of the majority of the population even under a capitalistic regime and actually bring about a repeal of these provisions of the penal code. I believe that in this it is of the highest possible significance that we can point to the good results that have been actually achieved in the Soviet-Union.

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I could conceive that just as in the case of the movement in favour of enlightenment regarding the use of contraceptive methods so also here the opposition will diminish year by year and that at a not distant future not only a general knowledge of contraception but also the absence of punishment for aborticide will be taken quite for granted.

The fight will certainly last for many years yet, and before the victory is won the lives and well-being of further millions of women will be jeopardized for the sake of the old penal code.

This year (1929) in Denmark a number of working women's organizations presented a petition to the Government. In sympathy with this movement we held a number of public meetings on the subject, and in these the existence of the W.L.S.R. was brought to the notice of the Danish public inasmuch as *Professor Jørgensen*, as representative of the league, gave an introductory lecture. This lecture was published in *Social-Demokraten*, the organ of the present Government, and gave rise to a newspaper discussion.

In signing this petition the Danish branch of W.L.S.R. has followed the course indicated in section 3, clauses *f* and *g*, of our statutes. The text of the petition is given verbatim in *The*

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*Working Women's Information Paper* for March, 1929, from which I quote as follows :—

“ On Thursday, 24th January, a delegation of working women presented the following written communication to the Ministry of Education :—

“ Representations of the following organizations :

“ The Working Women's Information Union, which represents organized women in most of the industrial occupations in Copenhagen.

“ The Female Iron and Metal Workers' Trade Union, which represents 3,000 female workers.

“ Branch 8 of the Female Workers' Trade Union, representing the organized female postal messengers, and

“ The World League for Sexual Reform, with branches in twenty-two countries,

“ Hereby apply to the Ministry of Education with the request that it will take steps to reform the educational programme of the elementary schools together with those of the training colleges and other institutions of education in such a way as to introduce compulsory instruction on sex questions. As the present condition is that in neither Higher Educational Institutions, Training Colleges, nor in the schools is any instruction concerning sexual relationship given, there is also a great need for such instruction to adults

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who are not in attendance at any educational establishment.

“ We respectfully apply to the Ministry of Education to institute such courses for adults, if possible, in connection with clinics where physicians will be in attendance to give free advice to those who seek guidance in sexual matters.”

On the same day the delegation was received by the Minister of Justice, and appeared before the Parliamentary Committee for the amendment of the Penal Law in order, on behalf of the same organizations, to voice the following demands :—

We request Parliament—

“ 1. That the new penal law shall not be allowed to include clauses that might hinder the spread of knowledge concerning, or of the use of methods of preventing, pregnancy.

“ 2. That the termination of a pregnancy already begun may be made permissible when it is undertaken at the request of the pregnant woman and in due order in a hospital or clinic with expert medical assistance.

“ The circumstances justifying such a petition are that :—

“ (a) The old penal law, in spite of its severity, has not been able to prevent numberless cases of intentional abortions. The penalties have simply

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meant that the law on this matter has struck at women of the poorer classes, for where sufficient means are available there will always be methods of evasion such as a trip abroad, etc. It has, on the other hand, brought death or severe life-long suffering to many less fortunately situated women by forcing them to resort to dangerous methods or to seek inexpert help. The numerous actions for infanticide must also be regarded as a consequence of this defect in the law.

“ (b) The Danish State has not surrounded motherhood with such a degree of protection that working women can always contemplate with confidence and gladness the birth of a child. Such an event is often a calamity, and a working woman is therefore justified in demanding that when this is the case she is legally entitled to rid herself of an embryo whose development she does not desire.

“ (c) We do not regard the termination of pregnancy as in itself desirable—on the contrary. But in our opinion to regard it as a punishable offence is a method ill calculated to combat the procuration of abortion. We regard the most widespread knowledge possible of contraception as the most suitable method under the present circumstances.

“ (d) The Danish public is ripe for such a law.

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A new moral in sexual matters is on the point of developing. In support of this we can quote, among other things, more than one case in which a jury has overidden the out-of-date paragraphs of the penal code by acquitting even in cases of murder of live-born children—and fair-minded public opinion has supported these findings. Society must concede to a woman as a free human being the right of deciding how often, if at all, she shall become a mother."

Naturally this petition has not yet produced any result, but it has aroused attention both in Parliament and in the Press and among the general public. It was received with a relative degree of goodwill which even a mere five years ago would have been quite unthinkable.

\* \* \* \* \*

In conclusion—just a few words with regard to sterilization. In my opinion sterilization is the best and most important means available for putting into practice our ideas of eugenics. I believe that the way that gives most prospect of actually carrying out eugenics as a practical policy is by means of information distributed to the whole population through the schools and in other ways, together with the free provision of the possibility of sterilization for everyone for whom

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there is a fear of bringing congenitally inflicted children into the world. But on the subject of sterilization most people are either vague or completely ignorant. The function of reproduction seems to be burdened with a powerful *taboo*—it must not be interfered with. And this applies not least to the attitude of the doctors to the question.

As an example of illustrating what I have said let me just mention an Act relating to availability of sterilization which has recently been passed in the Danish Parliament. It is the first attempt that has been made in Denmark to frame laws with an eugenic object in view. The Act bears the clearest impression of the anxious care that is taken to avoid offending against the taboo that rests on the reproductive function. Sterilization can be carried out only in institutions (for feeble-minded, epileptics, etc.), and in each individual case must the Minister of Justice give his consent.

Section 5 of the Act is a direct prohibition of sterilization that is not authorized by law and specially sanctioned by the Ministers of Justice, etc., which means that if an epileptic or other hereditarily inflicted person gets a doctor to sterilize him in order that he may not bring diseased children into the world the doctor is liable to be punished.

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This kind of obvious lunacy and horrible attack on personal freedom without the shadow of a reasonable justification is thus still always possible even in our enlightened age. The great majority of doctors and legislators seem to be happily at one in regarding this Act as a great advance and as charged with fairmindedness and reasonableness.

It is only the arrant out-and-out reactionaries who oppose the suggestion in the slightest, and they do so on the ground that it is in opposition to Divine law, etc.

I regard such an Act as the outcome of the previously mentioned superstition as to the power of legislative authority to arrange human affairs. As if it were not a general experience that the provisions of the law always follows, as a kind of official sanction, conditions that have already been established in the course of cultural development—in spite of, and often in direct opposition to, the existing judicial code !

In the case of eugenics I regard all legislation, both positive and negative, as mainly harmful and inhibitory of progress. The demand that in my view we must take is to remain free from interference on the part of our legislators.

THE END









